

Warplane to return to Walla Walla. And this year, a B-25 will accompany a B-17 that made a visit to the area in 2009.

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WALLA WALLA -- A piece of aviation history harkening back to the community's days as a World War II air base will make a return flight to the community in June.

Port of Walla Walla officials said Thursday they will work with the Arizona Wing of the Commemorative Air Force to bring back the B-17 bomber plane that made a landing in the community in 2009. This time, though, a B-25 will accompany it, said Jennifer Skoglund, manager of the Walla Walla Regional Airport.

"It's a great opportunity to get people here to the airport and see these aircraft -- get people to fly in them, touch them and see the airport," Skoglund said to Commissioners Paul Schneidmiller and Ron Dunning as she sought their support for the event. Commisisoner Mike Fredrickson was out of town and could not attend the meeting.

Tentative plans include a weeklong visit from the Arizona organization that's home to the B-17 "Sentimental Journey." The organization would arrive here from Olympia June 20 and depart the morning of the 27th.

The airport will tap into its advertising fund to pay for five hotel rooms for five nights and 500 gallons of fuel to cover a portion of the costs expected for the event. The total cost for the airport is expected to come in at less than \$5,000.

As was the case in 2009, Skoglund said visitors would likely get to see the planes for free, but fees are charged for going inside and for taking rides.

The touchdown in Walla Walla was a walk down memory lane for local veterans, Skoglund said. Organizers coordinated a welcome ceremony for veterans who stopped in to see the plane.

"That was the best part: Seeing the veterans and hearing their stories," she said.

With the success of the last visit behind them, Port and airport officials said they may be able to bring more attention to this year's stop. Possible ideas tossed around Thursday included a runway viewing of the movie "Memphis Belle" as well as an event that would pair the World War II planes with a collection of Mooney aircraft and pilots expected to continue their annual trek to Walla Walla June 25-26.

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